

To: CN=David Jewett/OU=ADA/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA[]
Cc: []
Bcc: []
From: CN=Ayn Schmit/OU=R8/O=USEPA/C=US
Sent: Thur 9/27/2012 12:01:46 AM
Subject: Fw: AP: New tests show less benzene in Wyo. gas field where EPA linked fracking, groundwater pollution

Ayn E. Schmit
 Water Policy Advisor

(PH) 303-312-6220 (FAX) 303-312-7150
 EPA Region 8
 1595 Wynkoop Street
 Denver, Colorado 80202-1129
 schmit.ayn@epa.gov

----- Forwarded by Ayn Schmit/R8/USEPA/US on 09/26/2012 06:01 PM -----

From: Richard Mylott/R8/USEPA/US
To: Jim Martin/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Ayn Schmit/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Lisa McClain-Vanderpool/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Paula Smith/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Martin Hestmark/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Sandy Fells/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Robert Ward/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Kimi Matsumoto/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Patricia Courtney/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Karen Edson/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, David Bloomgren/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Alisha Johnson/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Robert Delp/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, James O'Hara/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Gregory Oberley/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Kate Fay/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Howard Cantor/R8/USEPA/US@EPA
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Latest from AP.

<http://www.startribune.com/nation/171368521.html?refer=y>

New tests show less benzene in Wyo. gas field where EPA linked fracking, groundwater pollution

Article by: MEAD GRUVER , Associated Press

Updated: September 26, 2012 - 5:09 PM

CHEYENNE, Wyo. - New groundwater testing in Wyoming shows much lower levels of the carcinogen benzene than what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported when it linked contaminants in two water wells to hydraulic fracturing.

Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead said Wednesday that the state still needs to review the data from the U.S. Geological Survey, but he praised the new tests as an improvement over last year's EPA reports. Pavillion-area homeowners complain that their well water turned foul with chemicals when gas drilling picked up in their neighborhood about seven years ago.

The USGS, Wyoming, the EPA and two Indian tribes collaborated on the new testing after state officials criticized the EPA for not involving them in the earlier study.

The study drew a link between certain contaminants and fracking, which blasts water, sand and chemicals into wells to crack open rock fissures.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

The U.S. Geological Survey released results Wednesday from new groundwater tests in Wyoming where another agency linked hydraulic fracturing to contaminants found in two water wells and residents complained of chemicals polluting their well water.

The new USGS data come from samples taken in April at one of the test wells near Pavillion in central Wyoming. The other test well didn't produce enough water to yield samples deemed large enough to test.

Hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," is the petroleum industry practice of pumping water, sand and chemicals down well bores to crack open fissures and boost the flow of oil and gas.

Environmental groups have sounded the alarm about fracking for years — but with few, if any, examples of verified pollution.

Petroleum industry officials say the lack of verified pollution, out of many thousands of wells fracked in the U.S. over the past few decades, proves the process is safe.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the state of Wyoming, the USGS and two American Indian tribes collaborated on the latest sampling, which followed previous testing done solely by the EPA.

The EPA theorized a fracking-pollution link in a draft report released in December. The report drew heavy skepticism from petroleum industry and state officials, including Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead, who characterized the finding as a flimsy one.

Wyoming officials — whom the EPA briefed on its findings more than a month ahead of the report's release — also grumbled that the EPA hadn't kept them in the loop about what the federal agency was up to during the previous testing.

"Gov. Mead felt that this process was an improvement on how the first draft report from the EPA was done. It was more transparent. The team had input throughout the process," Mead spokesman Renny MacKay said Tuesday.

Even so, the EPA plans to post its own data separately, EPA Region 8 spokesman Rich Mylott said.

"All EPA data have gone through the agency's quality assurance process," Mylott said by email Tuesday.

EPA spokeswoman Alisha Johnson in Washington said Wednesday she did not know what data the EPA might release or when that might happen.

Testing by the EPA this past spring included new samples from five domestic water wells in the Pavillion area. That sampling happened outside the collaborative process.

One person each from the EPA, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, and the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone tribes on the Wind River Indian Reservation near Pavillion peer-reviewed the collaborative data, according to MacKay.

A full peer review of the sampling and findings to date will occur later.

MacKay said Mead wants "science and a good process" to guide any new findings.

"The governor's position has always been he wants this investigation to play out and whatever it finds, you move on from there," he said.

Richard Mylott

Public Affairs Specialist

Office of Communications and Public Involvement

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8

Phone: 303-312-6654